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Associated Press - Two U.S. representatives from Illinois announced legislation Thursday that could quadruple fines for cities that release sewage water into the Great Lakes, starting in 2027.

The legislation by Republican Rep. Mark Kirk and Democratic Rep. Dan Lipinski also would start a fund to help pay for wastewater treatment and wetland restoration.

Lipinski said dumping sewage into the Great Lakes "must end."

"It is disgusting, harmful and just plain wrong. Those who are dumping must stop doing it or be held accountable," he said in a statement Thursday.

The Great Lakes Water Protection Act would increase penalties for cities that violate Environmental Protection Agency regulations from up to \$25,000 to up to \$100,000 per violation per day by 2027. The congressmen say it would give cities time and federal money to upgrade their systems.

"By increasing penalties for dumping and creating a Great Lakes cleanup fund, we can ensure the environmental health of our water resources for future generations," Kirk said.

About 24 billion gallons of sewer overflow water are released each year into "the crown jewel of the Midwest," Kirk said in a statement. He called Detroit "the primary culprit," saying the city releases more than 13 billion gallons per year.

Detroit follows state and federal regulations with untreated water that is released into the Detroit River and flows into Lake Erie, according to Detroit Water and Sewerage Department spokesman George Ellenwood.

"Sewage dumping is really the wrong terminology," Ellenwood said Thursday. He said sewers can overflow whenever there is heavy rain or melting snow. That water, which is mixed with raw sewage, is allowed to be released in certain amounts.

Kirk and Lipinski praised Chicago's wastewater management and said it should be modeled.

Chicago last released sewage into Lake Michigan in August 2002, according to Dick Lanyon with the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago. The city releases sewer overflow into the Chicago and Calumet Rivers, which he said do not flow into Lake Michigan.